

Radio Free Europe/Munich
Office of the Policy Advisor
Background Information USSR

4 December 1959

SHORT CROPPING THE PLAN

The overall crop harvest in the Soviet Union this year is considerably less than the 1958 record yields and substantially behind the planned rate of growth called for in the Seven Year Plan. Total farm output was scheduled to increase by 70% during the Plan period, or just under 8 per cent per annum.¹ Present indications, however, actually point to a negative rate of growth during the initial year of Khrushchev's publicized drive to overtake the USA in food production.

Of the five major crops, only cotton appears to show a rise over the 1958 yield of 4.4 million tons of unginned fiber. Reports from the Central Asian republics indicate a 3 to 5 percent boost in yield.² This is largely the result of an expansion in the existing irrigation network. Cotton culture is now exclusively centered in Central Asia and Transcaucasia, where irrigation insures a rather stable yield.

The strategic grain crop is from 17 to 20 percent below last year, and because of its weighted influence on aggregate farm output a regression in the growth rate is a certainty.³ Extensive drought conditions prevailed in the Ukraine, Caucasus, lower Volga, and scattered areas - regions of high fertility where grain, sugar beets or sunflowers are concentrated. Even the maize yield was adversely affected. That the grain harvest was a disappointment may be gauged from press reports: - the harvest or procurements are being compared with a five year average.⁴

One of the crops on which the Soviets have allocated heavy investments in land and capital inputs, and where the progress has been marked, sugar beets, shows a sharp set-back. The Ukraine, where two-thirds of the USSR beets are grown - reports official sources as indicating a 21 per cent decline.⁵ As the remaining sugar beet growing is largely confined to the areas north and east of the Ukraine, where the grain yields were cut into, it follows that the yield in these regions was also reduced. Total output will likely not exceed the 1957 crop of 39.7 million tons

¹ Pravda, 7 February 1959. Decree of the CC CPSU.

² Pravda, 20 November 1959.

³ Selskoye Khozyaistvo, 7, 15 November 1959.

⁴ Background Information, 13 November 1959, "Soviet Grain Harvest, 1959 (IV)"

⁵ Pravda, 7 November 1959.

⁶ 1959 yield of 26 million tons from Pravda, 29 November 1959.
1958 yield from Pravda Ukraine, 6 January 1959.

compared to 54 million tons in 1958.

Potatoes and vegetables, given last year's optimum growing conditions, could not have shown any improvement. The absence of any purposive reports in the press indicates a reduced yield, although not of the magnitude of grain or beets.

The expansion in acreage of sunflowers last year produced the largest yield in history. As this oil crop is grown in the key regions where drought cut the grain yields, it is unlikely a normal harvest was brought in. This applies also the less valuable hemp crop; the flax crop appears unchanged. Altogether, a 5-7 percent drop is indicated.

No definitive statements on total crop production have been released this year. Nor is it likely that the December plenary session of the Central Committee will publicly discuss the aggregate harvest data. Accordingly projections are in order to estimate the progress made in the first year of the 7 Year Plan.

On balance, and given the proper weights of the various crop components, (with allowances for minor items as tea, fruit), it seems conservative to estimate fully a ten percent decline in total crop yields for 1959, compared to a planned increase of 5 percent.⁶

Clearly this is no progress toward fulfilling the unrealistic agricultural goals of the 7 Year Plan. It is more like a glacial drift. Super-harvests would be necessary to balance out the downward regression just to maintain net output. The green pastures on the plateau ahead cannot be reached by sloganeering.

CZ

⁶ Total farm output was planned at slightly under 8 percent a year. With crops weighted at two-thirds the total output, this would indicate a 5 percent planned rate of growth.